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UNCLAS WARSAW 003557

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: TUSK STILL LEADS IN TIGHTENING PRESIDENTIAL RACE

REF: WARSAW 3519 AND PREVIOUS

1. (U) Summary: Civic Platform (PO) candidate Donald Tusk remains the odds-on favorite to replace Aleksander Kwasniewski as Poland's next President, although the race with his principal rival, Law and Justice (PiS) candidate Lech Kaczynski is tightening in the final days before the October 9 election. Presidential campaigning and ongoing political pot shots between the two parties are not precluding negotiations between the two parties who are expected to form a center-right coalition government. Kaczynski benefits from the open support of the Solidarity trade union as well as ultra right-wing Catholic Radio Maryja. It is unlikely that Tusk will win an outright majority in the first round, which will force a run-off on October 23. End Summary.

2. (U) Donald Tusk, PO's presidential hopeful, is maintaining his lead over Warsaw mayor and PiS candidate, Lech Kaczynski, although some polls indicate his lead is dwindling. Daily polls released to the press consistently show Tusk on top, although his lead varies from three to eleven points. PO was once hopeful that Tusk could win an outright majority in the first round of balloting on October 9, but reflecting a more sober attitude after PO failed to win the parliamentary elections on September 25, most expect a run-off between Tusk and Kaczynski on October 23.

3. (U) Kaczynski's chances may improve with the active support of the Solidarity trade union and the open endorsement of Radio Maryja, a right-wing Catholic radio station that normally supports the League of Polish Families (LPR). LPR Presidential candidate Maciej Giertych dropped out of the presidential race on October 4, without formally endorsing Kaczynski. Giertych urged other minor candidates to drop out of the race so that a second round could be avoided, but so far no one has heeded his advice.

4. (U) Kaczynski continues to hammer away at Tusk with the same litany of criticism that proved decisive in securing PiS's come-from-behind victory, namely that Tusk is interested foremost in economic policies that will hurt the average Pole, making Poland "a republic for the rich." Tusk has characterized Kaczynski as "too impulsive" and lacking openness in conducting international relations. Tusk also said that PiS has "less trust in the external world" and "radical inclinations," warning that PiS should not have both of the top jobs. Both Tusk and Kaczynski thus have neatly flipped their positions from several weeks ago, when the roles were reversed and it looked as though PO would dominate both parliamentary and presidential elections.

Coalition Negotiations Move Forward Fitfully

5. (U) Preoccupation with presidential politics have slowed but not stopped coalition negotiations altogether. PiS candidate for prime minister, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, met yesterday with PO candidate for deputy prime minister, Jan Rokita. Rokita produced a letter containing a five-point plan for PO's approach to the coalition, all quite broad and short on detail. PO has called for the streamlining of government by merging two ministries, thereby reducing the cabinet from 14 to 12 ministries. Marcinkiewicz said the PO letter constituted the basis for talks between the parties for establishing the government's program.

6. (SBU) PO's Jacek Saryusz-Wolski remains widely expected to be named foreign minister; one senior MFA official reported that Saryusz-Wolski has the job locked up. Bronislaw Komorowski (PO), meanwhile, once the front-runner for defense minister, is now being mentioned as a possible Marshal (speaker) of the Sejm. Were Komorowski to become speaker, that would open up the defense slot, perhaps even for a PiS candidate (among those names in play from PiS are Radek Sikorski and Przemyslaw Gosiewski).
Ashe